

CASE STUDY

Hanley Castle High School, Worcester: Leading in language learning

Hanley Castle High School and Sixth Form, located in Worcestershire, is a high-performing mixed academy for students aged 11-18 years old. As a specialist school for languages, Hanley Castle secured funding for an eight classroom language block which opened in September 2008. For the last four years, the school has been using Vocab Express to support language learning in French, Spanish and German at GCSE level, and in recent months has begun using the new Vocab Express Android app.

Jacqui Burrows, assistant head with responsibility for teaching and learning and head of languages, shares her experience using Vocab Express.

At Hanley Castle, we're always on the lookout for ways to engage students through the use of language learning technology and strive to be creative with our schemes of work for the languages we offer. In the past we've found that asking students to complete traditional vocabulary lists in class takes up a lot of lesson time which could be better spent on other activities. We don't like to rely heavily on textbooks and have a real focus on challenge and independence, encouraging our students to take greater responsibility for their learning.

In Worcestershire, the local secondary schools have worked together to build a strong modern foreign languages (MFL) community. We undergo continuing professional development (CPD) training together and have head of MFL meetings on a regular basis. In one of these meetings we were recommended Vocab Express as a language learning tool that would meet our specific needs.

The benefits

To begin, Vocab Express enables teachers to keep track of their students' progress through its monitoring tools so that students can be rewarded when appropriate. In fact, many of our teachers have weekly Vocab Express winners. Scores can be reset at the start of the new week, keeping students motivated and determined to beat their classmates to the top spot.

Learning a language is not an easy task; it takes time and dedication. However, the whole process of how students learn vocabulary on Vocab Express supports how we teach vocabulary learning in school generally – repetition, quick feedback and breaking

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learning down into small manageable chunks. The tool's valuable native audio files also help students ensure they use the right pronunciation.

Vocab Express is an excellent tool for meaningful homework setting and as result can also be used for engaging parents. What's more, we also have the option to print out usage charts to show how much vocabulary learning each student is doing. This is also really useful as an intervention strategy because it allows teachers to set students regular, measurable targets for vocabulary learning.

Interestingly, Vocab Express also supports students' English literacy skills as they must get their English spelling right in the word card review displays.

With Vocab Express, vocabulary is carefully mapped to each exam course. We have tracked exam performance against Vocab Express usage and found that those students who use Vocab Express regularly perform better in mock exams than those who don't. This proves to students that by doing something that isn't very onerous like logging on to Vocab Express to test their vocabulary, it will have a positive effect on their grades.

The whole MFL department thinks Vocab Express is brilliant. Even for those teachers who aren't very tech savvy it's incredibly easy and very accessible, plus support from the Vocab Express team is outstanding.

With the recent launch of the new Vocab Express Android app, many of our students have had the opportunity to use this to improve their language vocabulary. They now have the chance to legitimately do their homework on the bus home and many have said they use it in their spare time. Mobile technology is a format students are familiar with and because of this, we've found that they are more likely to take greater ownership for their learning, thus it's incredibly conducive for their success.

Looking to the future

At the moment we're looking at investing in the Vocab Express Kerboodle add-on for our current A-Level language students; many used Vocab Express' tools at GCSE and there's been a real demand from them to be able to continue using this service.

The Vocab Express' Global Challenge is perfect for us; being in the run up to exams, we will be using it on a regular basis to help reinforce vocabulary learning. The school has different houses, so the Challenge can be used as part of a house competition.

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I'd wholeheartedly recommend Vocab Express to other schools looking for a tailored language tool for GCSE. It encourages students to be efficient, independent learners and has helped foster a genuine love for languages in our young people. What's more, with the anytime, anywhere access provided with the new Vocab Express app, we look forward to this becoming available on other platforms so all students can continue language learning on the go.