



**W**ayland Academy is a small rural academy in Norfolk with 672 pupils age 11-16. Previously a Specialist Technology College, it was one of the first schools in Norfolk to convert to an Academy. It is part of the TEN Group (Transforming Education in Norfolk), a federation with City Academy Norwich, Attleborough Academy Norfolk, Fakenham Academy Norfolk, Wayland Junior Academy Watton and the University Technical College Norfolk – one of the most improved Academies group in the country.

But as a small rural academy we work with limited budgets, the constraints of a 1950s building and poor internet availability, which is an issue for many UK rural communities. We do not boast a purpose built state of the art building and have no wi-fi within school, yet we do recognise the importance of delivering 21st century learning for our students and our most recent OFSTED inspection highlighted that higher levels of attainment than those seen nationally are reflected in a wide range of subjects.

We often read press articles about schools who have leased iPads or other mobile devices for their students and teach within state of the art facilities. Whilst this may well be the utopia for all schools – and perhaps we could look on in envy of such establishments – our senior management team has opted to take a different approach: what we lack in technology infrastructure we make up for in some of our other facilities, as well as our attitude

## Where there's **A WILL**

**A LACK OF THE LATEST INFRASTRUCTURE IS NO BARRIER TO PROVIDING THOROUGHLY MODERN LEARNING AT WAYLAND ACADEMY, AS ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL GLEN ALLOTT EXPLAINS...**

towards teaching and learning and our role within the community.

### **Community connections**

Employment opportunities can be limited within rural communities, but our region boasts a number of long standing engineering and construction companies, many with an ageing workforce. So, in 2009 we opened the Skills Centre – a collaborative project between ourselves, a group of local

businesses and the FE Colleges in the area. The skills centre offers practical qualifications in both construction and engineering to pre-16 year old students from the West Norfolk area, helping to raise aspirations and improve progression to further education and serve the needs of the local employer base.

The decisions we make are very much child and community centred, focused on meeting the needs and ambitions of our students for today and for tomorrow. We take immense pride in the way our students respond to their work and the community and we have high standards that embody 'old values of good manners, respect and honesty', preparing them for life ahead as active citizens in our beautiful county of Norfolk.

Whilst we believe these old fashioned values to be key to the success of our students, we nonetheless recognise the important role that new technology plays in helping to shape our students to become fully rounded, independent learners.

Rather than investing in expensive, soon to be out-dated IT suites which, due to our rural location, would inevitably be quite unreliable, we looked at what we can do with the technology that students have in their pockets – their mobile phones.

### **Pocket power**

One thing that most young people today have in common is their regular interaction with mobile technology, particularly their smart phone. It touches upon all aspects of their life – it's the way in which they communicate



with friends, share photos, play games and find out information on their favourite celebrities, so we asked, why not make it a vehicle for learning too?

A recent survey amongst our Year 9 students showed that 100% of them had access to a smart phone and 94% have access to the Internet at home, so we decided it would be foolish not to tap in to their direct access to technology.

However, the challenge for us was how to help students recognise that their phone, which they use to conduct all aspects of their personal life, could indeed be used for studies. Likewise, how could we convince members of staff, many of whom were understandably sceptical, that the phones in their students' pockets could be a useful learning tool and not simply something to confiscate for inappropriate use in class?

Last academic year we opted to pilot GCSEPod amongst our Year 11 students – realising that if we were going to encourage staff and students to use their devices for educational purposes then we needed to provide relevant content to help them to do so.

Even without an all singing and all dancing technology infrastructure our students and teachers could access this resource and utilise it both within and away from school via their own devices and Internet access.

But rather than simply leaving take up to chance, we have invested time working with different interest groups and the results have been fascinating – particularly amongst our middle ability Year 11 boys.

### Ringing the changes

Middle ability boys are a notoriously difficult group of students to engage with, and often reluctant to participate in activity within school or to complete traditional homework tasks, but this group of boys appeared to be



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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more than happy to download podcasts at home and indeed quite excited by doing so. In their words – they don't have time for reading books and long explanations; they like punchy, to the point factual information; having everything on their phone makes it easier to get organised and know what they should be doing; they have always got their phones in their hands so it's easy to access... and best of all, nobody need know they are doing it.

And it's not just this isolated group of students who appear to like using their mobile phones. Some of our top performing students are topping the download tables but furthermore they are also beginning to add their own resources and research to the podcasts, which is enhancing the content available to whole year groups and supporting their own independent learning.

We have worked closely with our teaching staff to encourage them to think of mobile



phones as huge learning resources. Some of our staff were already encouraging our students to use their own gadgets for research and capturing information, but for others this was new territory. Having ready-made content available has made it really easy for teachers to start to explore the potential of this technology, and increasingly they are using it to set homework and are looking at the wealth of other material available for use on mobile devices.

So for a small rural school with no wi-fi to speak of and limited budgets for building a robust ICT infrastructure we have been able to successfully introduce mobile learning and are very excited about what lies ahead. And whilst it is too early in say what impact mobile technology will have on our actual exam results, the usage stats and anecdotal feedback from students and staff alike would certainly indicate that taking phones out of pockets and into our classrooms is already having a hugely positive effect.