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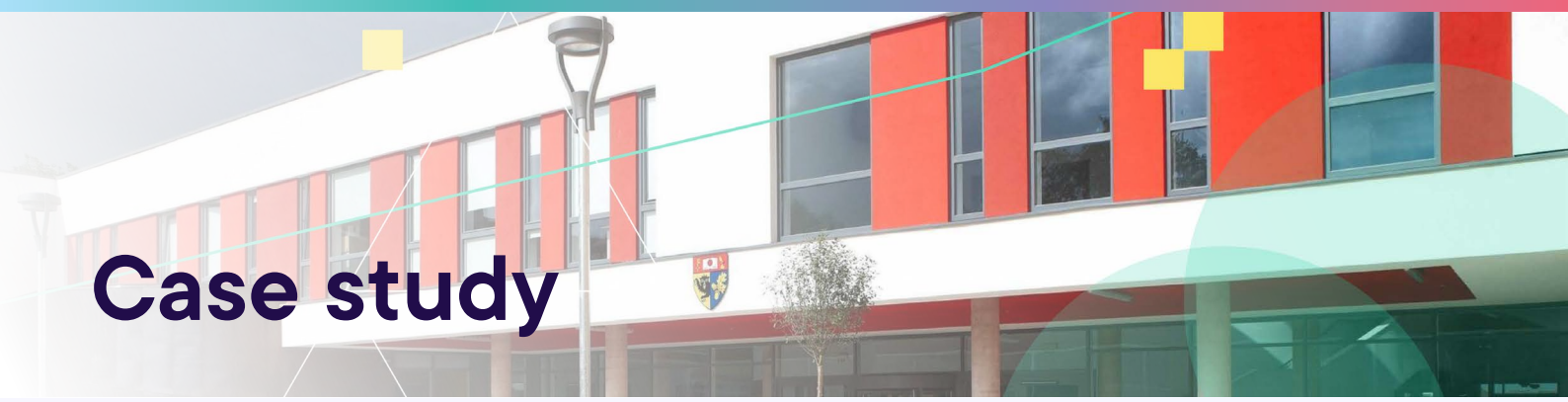

Case study

How Yate Academy made high-quality science homework part of a culture of hard work

School Profile

Location: Yate, Bristol

Number of students: 804

Pupil Premium: 22.21%

School type: 11–18 academy
(part of Greenshaw Learning Trust)



> *"Homework sits within a broader culture of students working hard, valuing hard work and being celebrated for it."*
>
> Eddie Rakshi, Headteacher,
> Yate Academy

A culture of high expectations and high support

At Yate Academy, **high expectations are matched by clear routines and practical support**, so students know what is expected and where to turn when they need help. That consistency runs through the school day. **Students hear the same language and follow the same core routines** across subjects, creating predictability and helping lessons move at pace.

Ofsted recognised this balance, noting that the school's "ambitious curriculum and high expectations" are coupled with additional support when students need it. Inspectors also found that students "listen carefully, work hard and show pride in their learning".

Homework sits within this wider culture. It is framed as **an important opportunity for students to practise, strengthen their knowledge and become more independent learners.**

Where Yate Academy started

Before Sparx Science, science homework was based around an in-house self-quizzing approach using knowledge organisers. Leaders were concerned that completing the work did not necessarily mean meaningful learning had taken place. Homework approaches also varied across the school, so students did not always receive the same consistent practice.

> ***"Completion was probably around 70%, but the quality was much lower. It was really hard for us to track whether students were doing it as we designed and intended."*** Tim Pottle, Homework Data Lead

To support its high-expectations culture, Yate wanted a **consistent, high-quality approach that could be adapted to individual students, linked closely to the curriculum and easily tracked.** This would allow staff to identify where support was needed and act before students fell behind.

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Their goal

- **Make meaningful homework a normal and valued part of school life.**
- **Give every student consistent, high-quality science practice.**
- **Use accurate data to celebrate effort, spot barriers and provide support at the right time.**
- **Maintain high expectations while adapting support for students who need it.**

The Yate Academy approach

Strategy 1: Make the weekly routine visible and predictable

Science homework follows the same rhythm every week. It is set centrally and due each Thursday, with teachers reminding students in lessons and displaying completion leaderboards from Sparx Science.

This consistency is supported across the school. As Head of Science Leo Lucas explains:

> ***"From the top of the school to the classroom teachers, there is 100% buy-in. There are regular reminders, but there's also a lot of support, so students have every chance to complete their homework. It is just part of life here."***

On Monday, Leo shares progress with the department. This gives staff time to encourage students who are on track and speak early to those who may need support. On deadline day, the report gives the school a clear, shared view of who has completed their homework and who still needs help.

Strategy 2: Turn data into action before students fall behind

Homework data is reviewed at every level of the school. Teachers monitor their classes throughout the week; Leo, Head of Science, shares reports with his team, and **homework completion is the first standing item in the senior leadership team's Wednesday meeting.** The data also helps staff understand what sits behind a student's completion rate. As Homework Data Lead Tim Pottle explains,

> ***"Sparx Science allows us to show individual students exactly what they've achieved or what they've missed."***

Staff can distinguish between someone who has attempted the whole homework but struggled with some questions, and someone who has not attempted part of it at all. This helps them **provide more precise feedback, decide what support is needed and have more informed conversations with families.**

Strategy 3: Keep expectations high and support students to succeed

Yate's expectation is unwavering. **Homework is completed fully and to a high standard, but students are given several ways to get there.**

A lunchtime homework club runs every day, giving students access to devices, a place to work and help from subject specialists. Students who are close to completion can finish the last questions with support. If work is still missing, compulsory after-school study support gives them time with a teacher to complete it.

For some students, the club has become their chosen place to work. Eddie, Headteacher explains:

> ***"It's packed before we've even reminded kids... they know that homework is important, they know that it has an impact. They also just know that we really care about it."***

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Strategy 4: For the hardest to engage students, take time to understand the barriers

For students facing additional barriers outside school, **staff begin by asking what will make completion possible.** They can adjust the length or level of homework for a short period, provide a laptop and food, or arrange for a trusted adult to work alongside the student.

The aim is to create a small success, recognise it and then build the demand back up as the student's confidence returns. As Hard to Reach Lead Tom Killigrew explains:

> ***"I think changing an attitude is making them see the small wins. They start completing it, and then they get praise for that. What that builds is little blocks of momentum."***

With Sparx Science, staff can **support this by temporarily adjusting the length or difficulty of a student's homework and choosing topics that give them the right level of challenge.** They can then gradually increase the demand again, without taking the student out of the same weekly homework routine as their peers.

Strategy 5: Connect homework to lessons, assessments and revision

Teachers use Sparx Science insights to see which questions or topics students have found difficult and bring those areas back into classroom teaching. Around assessments and mocks, the department shares relevant independent-learning topics centrally, giving every student a clear revision route without each teacher having to create separate materials.

Students described recognising ideas from Sparx in lessons and exams, including photosynthesis and equations. A Year 10 student also explained how revisiting topics through homework can help strengthen their understanding:

> ***"Sometimes, if I haven't understood something in the lesson, I can work through it on Sparx. Then, when we go back to it in class, I understand it better and can do more in the lesson."***

Strategy 6: Recognise effort and celebrate success

Yate talks about homework throughout the week, not only when something is missing. Teachers display the Sparx Science hand-in page in lessons and recognise students who are ahead of schedule, while early completers can earn a golden ticket worth ten house points. This creates friendly competition and reinforces the message that effort is noticed and valued.

The result, says Headteacher Eddie Rakshi, is that

> ***"There's a real buzz about doing your work and being good at your homework".***

The same positive approach is used with staff. Leo, Head of Science, shares regular progress updates with the department, highlighting the strongest-performing classes and recognising the teachers who have helped build good routines:

> ***"It's nice to say, 'This group has tried really hard and they're now the top class in the school,' and to tell staff, 'Well done, you're clearly building this culture in your group.' As a department, we spend a lot of time on the positive side of things."***

By combining positive recognition with calm, consistent follow-up, Yate has made homework part of everyday school life. Students know what is expected, organise their work around the weekly routine and increasingly take responsibility for completing it without the same level of prompting.

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The difference it's made

94 - 95%

Completion rate

Current homework completion across Sparx platforms throughout the school, tracked week by week.

96%+

Completion rate - Years 7–9

Sparx Science completion in Years 7–9 is consistently at or above this level.

50.7% → 67.9%

Pupil achievement

Pupils achieving 5+ in Science (2024 → 2025)

71.3% → 79.4%

Pupil achievement

Pupils achieving 4+ in Science (2024 → 2025)

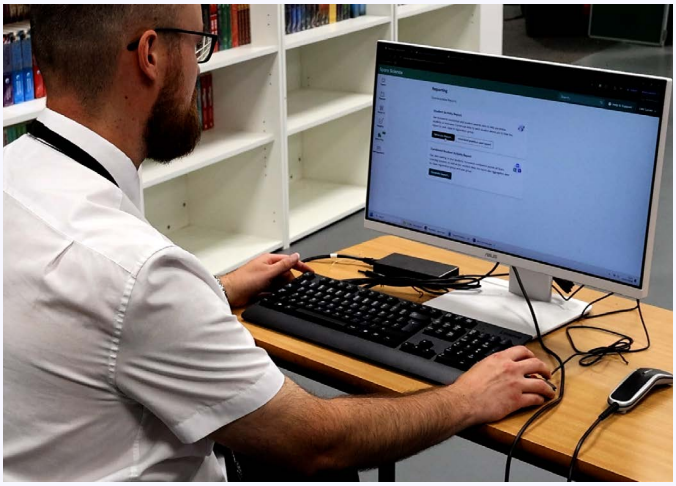
The improvement at Yate is not only in whether homework is completed. Leaders now have greater confidence in the quality of the work students are doing, while teachers can see the effort students have made and identify areas where they need more support.

Students also described **recognising ideas from Sparx Science in lessons, remembering knowledge more easily and using the platform independently for revision.** One Year 8 student said their **science assessment score had risen from around 70–75% to 85%** after using Sparx more intensively for revision. Another described **moving from around 80% to over 90%.**

These are individual, student-reported examples, but they show how students connect regular practice with greater **confidence and stronger performance with, a year 10 student adding:**

> ***"If you pay attention and actively recall what you're learning, it helps you apply it in lessons."***





The approach has also **reduced the administration involved in setting and monitoring homework.** Leo can quickly download a whole-school report and teachers no longer need to print, collect or mark multiple sets of work. **They retain control over the topics, level and length, while having more time and better information to plan teaching and support students.**

Most importantly, **Sparx Science is embedded within Yate's wider culture rather than treated as a standalone intervention.** Expectations are clear, completion is visible and support is readily available.

> ***"I think where homework is most impactful here is the culture that it creates around hard work. It's just normal at this school to work really hard."***

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