

No bored pupils at Isobel Mair School

Isobel Mair, Renfrewshire/Scotland



SMART solutions allow teachers to create bespoke multi-sensory materials for their classes.

The Isobel Mair School in the Clarkson area of East Renfrewshire marked its Silver Jubilee recently, celebrating 25 years of educating children from 5 to 18 with a wide range of support needs – from severe to very complex learning difficulties.

This unique learning facility is the only special needs school in East Renfrewshire, Scotland, and currently teaches 68 boys and girls from across the local community and other neighbouring education authorities. It is a huge test for any school to try and discover what motivates children and young adults, let alone a school with such a wide range of additional needs. Any solution needs to be easy to use, flexible enough to appeal to a wide range of ages and physical needs, and also become a long-term educational aide.

Isobel Mair takes an individualised approach to each pupil's education, with an elaborate focus on what works for each child. For older pupils in particular, it is especially difficult to source and implement materials that are suitable to this age group, without appearing childish or inappropriate. Lessons have to be presented in a creative and exciting format in order to truly reach pupils of all ages. As part of the process of harnessing the power of ICT to support all aspects of learning and teaching, staff at Isobel Mair School started to investigate channels to help them do just this. The school acted on independent advice and started looking at implementing an interactive whiteboard.

After reviewing different types of interactive whiteboard, a visit to SETT (now The Scottish Learning Festival) – the biggest Educational event in Scotland – provided an opportunity to test potential products. With the help of their own independent ICT consultant, funded from the staff development budget, the school put in place a rigorous in-house inset programme.

Isobel Mair hosted a social evening with the SMART Board® interactive whiteboard taking pride of place and pupils, teachers, parents and local

Challenge

To harness the power of new technology to facilitate the education of pupils with learning difficulties and maintain their interest throughout the lesson.

Solution

SMART Board® interactive whiteboards and Notebook™ software are utilised throughout the school allowing teachers to create bespoke multi-sensory materials for their classes.

Result

The technology allows teachers to think outside the box with lesson planning and make learning fun – crucial for children with special needs.

governing bodies all congregating at the school. The next morning, Head Teacher Mari Wallace received the call informing her that £10,000 had been secured to buy two more boards. The children's reactions to the board and the work that they had produced with it, were simply too impressive to ignore.

Custom-built in 1982, Isobel Mair has grown in size and influence in Scotland. Just two years on from its initial SMART Board implementation, Isobel Mair now has nine boards, one in every classroom. This is a big investment – but an invaluable one as far as the school, its teachers and the pupils are concerned.

Isobel Mair's teachers have been particularly taken with Notebook software – a content based software program provided with the SMART Board that allows teachers to create bespoke multi-sensory materials for their class. Isobel Mair pupils are highly motivated by these activities which cater for a range of learning styles and individual needs.

This thought process was reinforced last year when the boards were out of use for a few days. Mari comments: "To the children, it was a catastrophe. They were coming to me ashen faced and asking how they were going to be able to do their lessons. They simply couldn't fathom how they would be able to work without them. Even though we had the boards back online very quickly, it just showed us their true value."

The school has been the recipient of many accolades and awards, but the best reward of all is seeing children and young people becoming successful learners and having fun in the process. "Our approach works for the pupils and ensures that high levels of achievement and attainment are maintained with all students fulfilling their potential. The school is committed to ensuring that its pupils have access to and use of the very best technology available," says Mari.

The interactive whiteboards have helped teachers to think outside the box in terms of lesson planning – they are a tool that enables them to make learning fun. When dealing with children with special needs, it is even more important to grab their attention.

For example, one of the children is a huge fan of Eastenders and staff have devised lessons putting the content into a context that the pupils find interesting and relevant. "With our children this isn't just a 'nice thing to do', it is sometimes the only way we can engage with them and enable them to learn. Being a special needs school means that all our teaching resources must be tailored to the individual child's needs," says Mari.

When the theme tune plays, the pupils all know that it is time for their Maths lesson to begin and they play with concepts such as having 'Beale's Café' on the whiteboard, and calculating problems with the price of doughnuts. The teachers have found this invaluable in helping these children focus their attention. It really is a case of only being limited by imagination. While this lesson was the school's own idea, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and Notebook software have enabled its delivery, and encouraged the staff to be more creative and make the leap to go even further.



SMART Board® interactive whiteboards help to maintain student interest throughout the lesson.

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Mari Wallace,

Head Teacher, Isobel Mair School

About SMART

SMART Technologies is a leading provider of collaboration solutions that transform the way the world works and learns. We believe that collaboration and interaction should be easy. As the global leader in interactive whiteboards, we bring more than two decades of collaboration research and development to a broad range of easy-to-use, integrated solutions that free people from their desks and computer screens, so collaborating and learning with digital resources are more natural.

Steljes Ltd

Steljes is a SMART authorised distributor for SMART Technologies

info@steljes.co.uk

08450 724 800

www.mysmartspaces.co.uk