

SMART Showcase School Profile

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Technology Belongs to the Students at Isobel Mair

By Heather Ellwood



“The technology lives in the classrooms, and it belongs to the children. It’s a tool to support all aspects of learning and teaching. That’s how it’s used in our school.”

Mari Wallace

Head Teacher
Isobel Mair School
Glasgow, Scotland

“At our school, using technology is not an option – it’s an expectation,” says Mari Wallace, head teacher of **Isobel Mair School**, a 55-educator, 70-student facility in Glasgow, Scotland. The school’s students are between the ages of 5 and 18 and have a wide range of special needs. Technology at Isobel Mair underpins teaching as the staff strives to meet those needs. “The technology lives in the classrooms, and it belongs to the children. It’s a tool to support all aspects of learning and teaching. That’s how it’s used in our school,” Wallace says.

Because of this innovative use of technology, Isobel Mair has become SMART’s first Showcase School in the UK. The school has been using SMART products since 2004 and now has twelve **SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards** – one in every classroom. The school also has **SMART Response interactive response systems** and a **SMART Table interactive learning center**.

The initial decision to go with the SMART Board was really made by the students, explains Sarah Clark, deputy head teacher and member of the school’s technology team. “We provided them with different interactive boards to try and we facilitated the process, but the students chose what they preferred – and they preferred the SMART Board,” says Clark.

Because many of Isobel Mair’s students have diminished or impaired fine motor abilities, the fact that they are able to interact directly with the SMART Board, in a wide variety of ways, makes a huge difference, says Lynn O’Brien, teacher and member of the technology team. Wallace agrees, saying, “Our students know they can access the SMART Board using the pens if they want, but if the pen doesn’t work for them, they can use their fingers, their hands or their elbows. They can use any bits of their body and make the board work.”

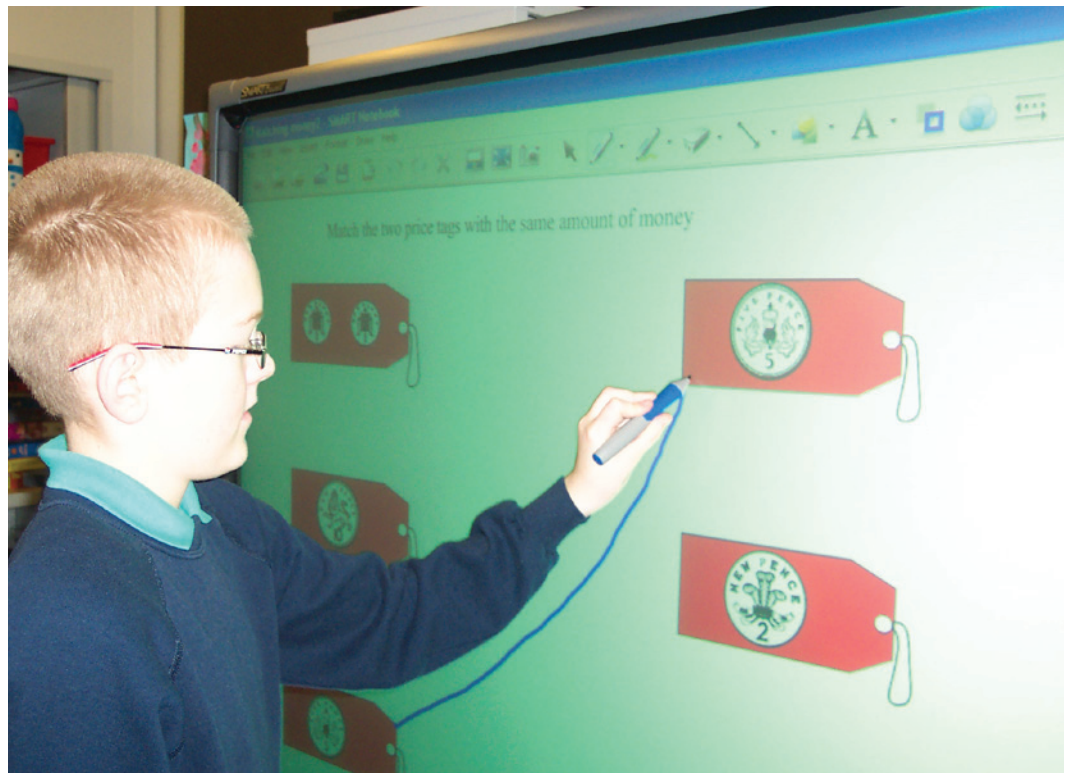
Individualizing and differentiating

Teachers at Isobel Mair believe that when barriers are removed for students with special needs and they are given the chance to work directly with materials and content, learning happens. Because these students have such a range of complex learning challenges, the school has a particular focus on individualizing and differentiating, says Wallace. She explains that teachers often create their own resources to augment and support the “sensory curriculum they are charged with delivering to our students.”

This is where **SMART Notebook** comes into play. The software fits into the school’s overall technology philosophy, which centers on providing teachers with accessible and adaptable tools to help individualize content and resources as necessary. Teachers tap into their students’ interests and use SMART Notebook software to create resources that emerge from those interests – while still meeting specific curricular goals. “The way Notebook supports the teachers’ ability to adapt and create is a huge advantage,” says Wallace.



If you would like to visit Isobel Mair School to talk with educators about their success and see firsthand how they're putting SMART products to work, visit the SMART Showcase School section of our education website. From this page, you can also find a Showcase School or District in your area.



A key component of the school's approach is ensuring the complex individual needs of all students are met. Because the chronological age of students is often much older than their learning age, the onus is on the teachers to have age-appropriate resources. These can be difficult to find commercially, so Isobel Mair teachers turn to SMART Notebook software, using it as a foundation for creating lessons that include content the students find meaningful. Whether that means creating a geography lesson activity based on the World Cup soccer tournament, a science icebreaker activity accompanied by the theme music to the Harry Potter movies, or a math unit using the popular British television show, *The Eastenders*, the results are the same – students are keen and engaged. And increased engagement means increased student learning outcomes.

Better behavior. Better learning.

Just as in North America, students in Scotland's secondary schools undertake national achievement tests, even those with diagnosed and identified learning difficulties. The teachers at Isobel Mair have found that since they've introduced SMART products, their students have scored at a higher level on these tests. According to Clark, "In the past two years, more pupils are passing at higher levels than ever before."

She believes this success is due to many different factors, all of which relate to the teachers' creative use of technology. "Not only do we use technology in all of our teaching, but we use it as a method of assessment. When we do this we've found that it increases the motivation of our students. It's something that they want to do. So we are able to get them to perform what they need to, in order to achieve their levels," explains Clark.

Primary or elementary level classes have experienced improvement as well, say the teachers. Clark attributes this mainly to increased student motivation. In the teaching of children with special needs, she says, better behavior often leads to better learning. "We've found our levels of achievement across the entire student population have increased, and part of that is because our students are having fun with technology. They're motivated and they want to learn."

No matter the grade level or the subject area, at Isobel Mair School it's not the technology that's important, but rather what the students and teachers do with it, says Wallace. "Our focus is always on innovation, creativity and hard work. We embrace that." **EC**

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