



Isobel Mair

You won't find any bored pupils at Isobel Mair with SMART Board™ interactive whiteboards

The Isobel Mair School in the Clarkson area of East Renfrewshire marks its Silver Jubilee this year, celebrating 25 years of educating children from five 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.

"We wanted the best solution for our pupils. Some interactive boards would only work with a stylus and this wasn't practical or feasible for children with special needs. In fact, it could be a barrier to learning. The SMART Board interactive whiteboard was far more appropriate, as it could allow children to touch the boards directly with their hands or any part of their bodies."

**Mari Wallace, Head Teacher
Isobel Mair School.**



The Challenge

It's 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.

The solution

As part of 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 whiteboards, a visit to SETT (now The Scottish Learning Festival) – the biggest Educational event in Scotland – provided an opportunity to delve deeper into each product and test them in person.

With the help of their own independent ICT consultant, funded from their staff development budget, the school put in place a rigorous in house inset programme.

Lesson one

Isobel Mair hosted a social evening, with the SMART Board interactive whiteboard taking pride of place with pupils, teachers, parents and local governing bodies all congregating at the school. The next morning, 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, and comprising nine rooms, a small technology base, an interactive sensory room and a central general purpose hall used for physical education and soft play activities, Isobel Mair has grown in size and influence in Scotland. Just two years on from its initial SMART Board interactive whiteboard 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.

Delivering results

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

This was reinforced last year when the boards were out of use for a few days. Mari Wallace said: "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."

Looking forward

"This approach works for our pupils and ensures that high levels of achievement and attainment are maintained with all pupils fulfilling their potential. The school is committed to ensuring that its pupils have access, and use, of the very best technology

available" said Mari Wallace.

The school has been the recipient of many accolades and awards but the best accolade of all is seeing children and young people becoming successful learners and having fun in the process.

Enriched lessons

The interactive whiteboards have helped teachers to think outside the box in terms of lesson planning. The interactive whiteboard is 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 fun, 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" Mari Wallace says.

When the TV series' theme tune plays, the pupils all know that it is time for their Maths lesson to begin, 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 attentions.

It really is a case of only being limited by your own imagination. Whilst this lesson (Eastender's money) was the school's own idea, the SMART Board interactive whiteboard and Notebook software have enabled the delivery of it, and encouraged the staff to be more creative and make that leap to do more.

"All the teachers in the school have embraced the use of ICT. And they keep pushing me for more. Our server, purchased with BECTA Excellence Awards prize money, is invaluable and we are in the process of purchasing a voting system that we will use with our pupils as part of our assessment process.

We firmly believe ICT isn't the 'bolt on' extra at the end of the day, something that is just tacked on once the 'real' teaching is done. At Isobel Mair we see ICT as the cog on which we can build a child centred curriculum."

*Mari Wallace, Head Teacher
Isobel Mair School.*



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