

## Whole school creative digital media at St Helen's Catholic Primary School

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St Helen's Catholic Primary School has 150 pupils in an area of Barnsley, South Yorkshire, described by Ofsted as having social and economic disadvantage. The school has used digital media to drive creativity in the curriculum and whole school change.

### Tags:

Primary, Enablers CPD, Digital visual/audio, Literacy, Cross-curricular, City Learning Centre

### Harnessing technology system outcomes:

Engaged and empowered learners

Enabling infrastructure and processes

### Sectors:

Primary

### Innovation

St Helen's school integrates creative digital media in everyday teaching across the curriculum to target the development of the children's speaking and listening skills. This approach has been made sustainable by an emphasis on ensuring that staff are appropriately skilled and confident with the technology and that assistance is readily available.

Further, resourceful timetabling ensures high support for both staff and children during digital media projects. As such, the children can work in adult-supported smaller groups and are encouraged to be active in negotiating the nature and direction of their work. Crucially for listening and speaking skills, the children's work is created for an audience outside the classroom by the work being regularly exhibited on the school website, or sent home on a DVD.

## Background

In 2002 Phil Harrison, the Headteacher of St Helen's, joined the Creative Partnerships programme, a national initiative to foster development of creativity in schools by partnering with creative practitioners. The aim of St Helen's was to equip the school to use creative media specifically to support the children's speaking and language skills. The programme ran, not always smoothly, for six years and included outside agencies coming into school to work directly with the children and to train staff. Towards the end of the programme St Helen's forged close links with their local City Learning Centre (CLC) in order to sustain activity after withdrawal of funding support for work with creative practitioners.

In September 2007, Mr Harrison appointed a higher level teacher assistant, Melanie Fisher, who has great enthusiasm and skills in media work, as the school's media co-ordinator. Ms Fisher has a clear understanding of both ICT and the Primary Framework for Literacy and is able to provide first hand support for teachers in incorporating digital media as an integral part of their planning and teaching.



## Technology

During the Creative Partnerships programme, the school converted a resource store into a TV and film making studio, which houses professional cameras and editing equipment and allows blue screen filming. In addition, every classroom is equipped with an interactive whiteboard, between three and nine desktop computers, a digital camera and audio recorder.

The main creative media projects tend to cover animation, live-action filmmaking and digital imagery. The children use a variety of software with the most popular media applications being Photoshop, Crazy Talk and Comic Life. The resulting work is often showcased on the school website, with the children also keeping the site up to date with work specifically designed to communicate home/school information creatively.

## Teaching and learning

Ms Fisher notes how creative digital media work lends itself to the children naturally evaluating their work. In particular, children notice how effectively they communicate and spontaneously offer suggestions for improvement:

*"When children see their work, immediately they are evaluating it, saying 'we should have done this', 'next time we'll do that'. They only have to see it once and they know what they want to do to put it right, whereas if you just tell them they don't always understand."*

It is also noticeable how some of the work requires patience in quite repetitive tasks and how some children who struggle in other areas of the curriculum are empowered by the activity lending itself to a high degree of consolidation of skills. Thus the teacher is able to sensitively ensure that these children have the opportunity to take a lead in these areas with their peers.

## Impact

In 2008 an Ofsted Inspector stated: *"In all my 100 inspections I have never seen work of such quality that underpins so much of the school's work in literacy. It, undoubtedly, is affecting standards and achievement across the curriculum"*.

Although wary of using SAT results as a measure of success, Mr Harrison observes how the number of children achieving a level 5 in their English Key Stage 2 SATs has significantly increased since the introduction of the creative media work. However, he also comments that the most significant impact has been on the children's self confidence, collaborative and planning skills, social skills and enthusiasm for learning. This is apparent when talking to the children about their work. Comments from the children include:

*"It was fun just working together and planning it and making the animation and when we watched it at the end it was really good and made me feel really proud."*

Y6 Pupil

*"I liked doing the camera, taking photos, it was cool. The best bit is putting the stuff around the photos on the computer. We put some blue fishes around our photo."* Y1 pupil



The work has not only inspired the children, but has had a dramatic effect on the IT skills of the staff, with many pursuing their interests and developing their competences out of school. For example, six of the school's ten teaching assistants are currently enrolled on an NVQ level 4 ICT course in their own time, independent from the school's CPD programme.

## Challenges

One ongoing challenge is the maintenance of the equipment. The school's media co-ordinator is technically very skilled and so is able to carry out some of this herself; however, in other instances getting outside support can be financially costly.

The school appreciates the safety issues of needing parental permission for children to be videoed and photographed. In St Helen's, nearly all parents/carers have given such permission; however, as this can be central part to some of the projects, the staff need to be sensitive to individual children feeling excluded or differentiated against if permission has not been granted.

## Wider adoption

If a school wished to adopt this approach, St Helen's recommends linking to other schools already using digital media and seeking support from their local CLC. In addition, Mr Harrison attributes the key to St Helen's success and the sustainability of the work to ensuring all staff had enough training and support to feel confident in this area of work. The commitment of the staff, particularly the Headteacher, has been instrumental in driving the projects and plan for sustainability which included the appointment of a media co-ordinator freed from other classroom responsibilities, who is on site and accessible for support.