

EVERY CLASSROOM MATTERS

If you couldn't make it to the BETT show earlier this year, we've spoken to the hardy exhibitors who were there for all of the four hectic days and sifted through the announcements to bring you highlights of the trends from the show

Earlier in the year, OFSTED announced plans to clamp down on 'boring teaching'. If you have a niggling suspicion that some of your classrooms could do with an injection of interest, where better to look for inspiration than the huge and buzzing exhibition halls of BETT.

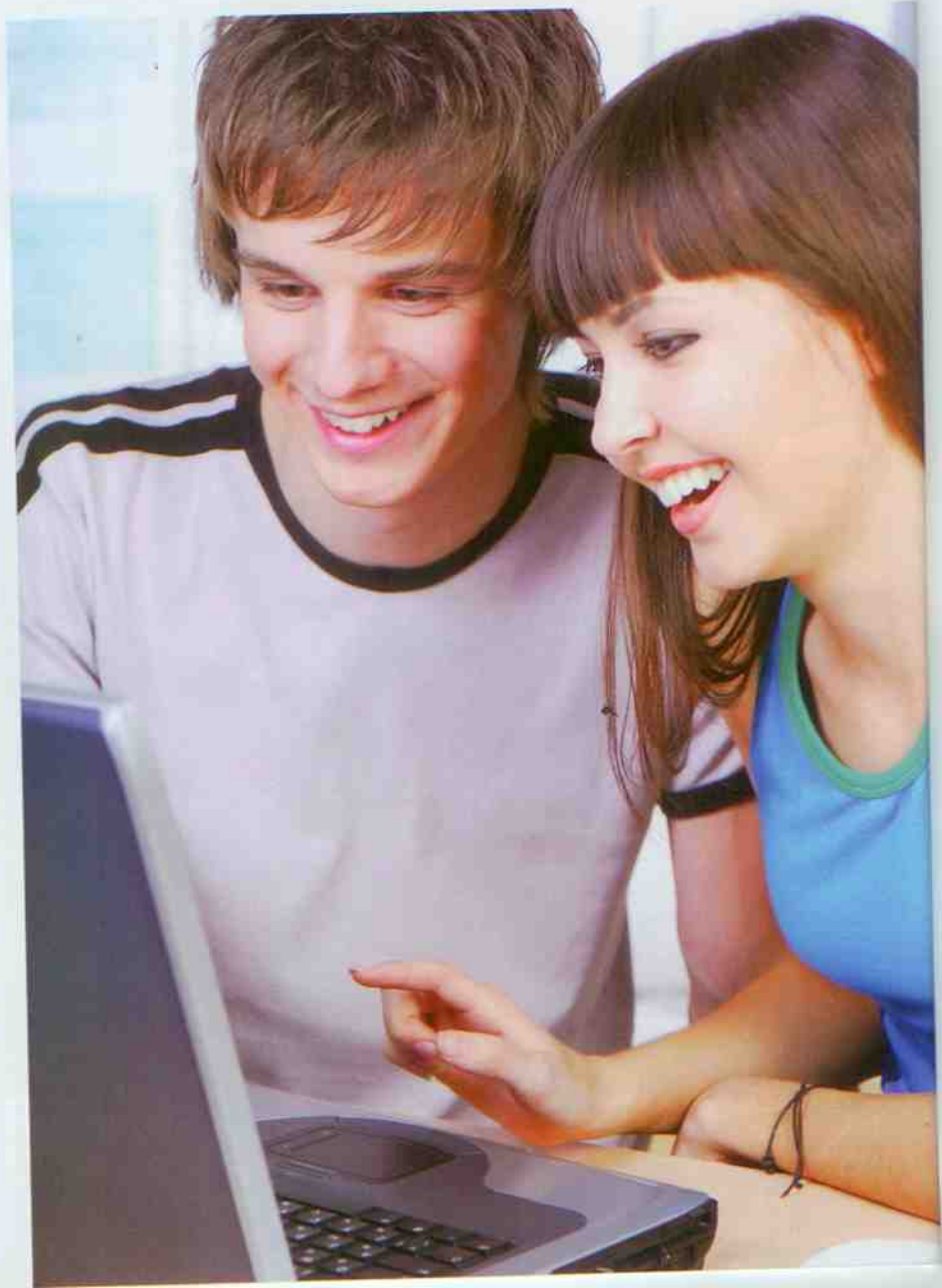
From mobility and collaboration to colour resources and outdoor learning, there were plenty of ideas to support teaching and learning, as well as ways to make the business and admin sides of your school run smoothly to enhance achievement.

ENGAGING PUPILS

Educating pupils is the core of what you do, and not surprisingly the core of BETT, too. But as Raj Pandya, general manager for business-to-business channels, Sony UK, notes, before we can educate pupils we have to engage them. "Pupils who are used to a multimedia visual experience are increasingly disinterested and disengaged by the written word, and education facilities now understand that they have to go beyond traditional teaching methods and harness the power of technology and rich multimedia content, in order to meet the aspirations of pupils."

Before we delve into natty virtual ways of engaging pupils we don't want to overlook the more 'low tech' options. Debbie Hage, education channel marketing manager, Ricoh UK, reminds us of the value of a technicolour learning experience: "Research conducted by the Wagner Institute for Color Research suggests that learning is enhanced if the brain is stimulated by colour, but cost-conscious schools have historically restricted colour printing to central reprographics departments and official, external documents. Students rarely get the full benefit of colour in their learning resources."

New technologies on show at BETT →



offered lower cost colour printing options to provide brighter learning resources, as well as cost effective ways to save on printing costs and eliminate wastage by bringing small print jobs, such as school photos, calendars and newsletters, in-house.

Roger Broadie, business development director, Frotrade also emphasises an old fashioned virtue for dispelling boredom: trust. "Teaching is boring if the pupils' concept of school is 'boring'. But if their attitude to school is one of 'ownership', what once was boring may no longer be so, and the more positive attitude of the pupils enables the teachers to experiment and take the risks that can stimulate and inspire," he says, explaining that the most positive trend he saw at BETT was a growth of trust shown by schools which enable pupils to take more control of virtual and physical learning environments as well as by teachers sharing resources.

MOBILITY

Previous BETTs may have focused on interaction, but this year there was a real focus on mobility and flexible, personal learning.

"Over the last six years, the focus on interactive whiteboards has moved us further towards a teacher-led, whole-class teaching model," says Ray Fleming, Microsoft UK education marketing manager.

"But now that over half of the classrooms in the country have them, the political agenda has swung back to 'personalised learning'. And BETT followed that trend – with more netbooks, designed for every pupil to have their own, and also the new (and

substantially bigger) 'surface table' computers, designed to get small groups of pupils working together to solve problems or explore information."

The range of mobile computing devices on show was large, but there were also large numbers of supporting systems such as wireless networking options and storage solutions, suggesting this trend is now becoming widely accepted.

We also saw the release of new digital pen presentation systems which allow teachers to present from anywhere in the classroom – a move away from the fixed IWB where a teacher must stay near the front. "There is no better way to encourage interaction than to allow pupils to openly annotate their thoughts and suggestions direct and live on screen to the rest of the class," comments Gerard O'Mahony, marketing director Hamelin Paperbrands "The mobility of this kind of unique interactive teaching aid can only enhance debate, discussion and direction when dealing with either the most simple or difficult of subjects."

"This now means pupils and teachers have more time to concentrate on the subject at hand, share ideas and be more creative, thereby increasing retention," adds Ewa Johnson marketing manager of OKI, who notes that some systems mean finished documents in PDF format can be created and →

“Previous BETTs may have focused on interaction, but this year there was a real focus on mobility and flexible, personal learning”



printed at the click of a button, saving time for teachers creating hand-outs or post-lesson follow up resources.

Mobile learning is also extended beyond the school walls. "We saw a buzz around taking learning beyond the classroom. When development competencies such as PLTS (personal, learning and thinking skills) from the QCA call for students to tackle these difficult-to-measure, somewhat intangible skills, it is important to be able to support their learning in any realm and at any time," says Tony Lockwood, head of consultancy, Serco Learning. "New products as shown at BETT 2009 allow students to compile a bank of evidence of learning to which new examples can be added from anywhere: school, home or anywhere with access to the internet."

COLLABORATION

Collaboration was high on the agenda at BETT: within schools, between schools, between home and school and even between ICT companies.

Geoff Elwood, CEO of Etech Group, which announced no less than eight partnerships, explains part of the thinking behind a string of collaborations between companies across the ICT spectrum: "It is crazy for any company to think it can be a one-

stop shop and provider of everything and everyone. As teachers become more familiar with using technology they will want greater access to a wider range of resources and tools to increase learning outcomes."

Interoperability between systems is also becoming increasingly important: a survey carried out by Pearson Phoenix revealed that system interoperability has become the key factor for schools when considering a new MIS. We're also seeing VLE providers joining together to develop unified VLEs, says Chris Scarth, MD, Prime Principal, who adds that "with increased content now available, VLEs are really set to come into their own this year."

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Several new products supported collaborative learning, from interactive tables with touchscreen capabilities to safe social networking sites for pupils and teachers. But we are also seeing an increased need for schools to collaborate, whether because of Diplomas or simply a desire to engage pupils in a new way.

But this extra-school collaboration, especially for Diplomas, presents some interesting dilemmas, notes

Hal MacLean, director of learning at Cleveratom. "Current 'approved' learning platforms are not yet communicating clearly between themselves and alternative solutions are needed that don't depend on a single school's management system. Such platforms do exist, and these often offer greater opportunities for collaboration when managed well."

Lockwood suggests one technological aid to collaboration: "MIS with web-based interfaces allow teachers at schools and colleges to access the same up-to-date information around the clock meaning that wherever a student's learning takes place, teachers can have relevant and accurate notes about absences, achievements, behaviour and so on."

The move towards cross-school learning, or learning out of school, has also driven an interest in HD videoconferencing technology, says Pandya. "It's not surprising that there is a lot of buzz in this area when you consider that a number of schools within a county could potentially link-up and tap into a specialist expert's knowledge, for example by interacting in real-time with a physics class hosted by an astronaut visiting one of the schools, and all whilst sharing the costs." →

