

# Turning good pupils into great pupils



## Setting the Scene

Accrington's Peel Park Primary School sits beneath the magnificent West Pennine Moors that keep watch over this part of Lancashire.

It's a school with a proud history. Dating back to 1910, Peel Park is sited upon the original home ground of the almost-mythical Accrington Stanley Football Club, which rose from the ashes of financial disaster after being immortalised in a TV advertisement. Peel Park has also produced cricketers David and Graham Lloyd and some notable names from nearby Blackburn Rovers Football Club.

It's a huge school, with nearly 600 children, and each year group has either three or two-and-a-half classes, with the halves doubling-up into a mixed-year group. Peel Park is popular locally and oversubscribed, a rarity in Lancashire, which has a tumbling population.

## The Situation

Peel Park is a good school. It fosters an excellent community spirit, the children behave in an exemplary manner, and education regulator Ofsted speaks in glowing terms about the pupils, the teachers and the teaching. But ambitious Deputy Head Teacher Alan Henderson wanted his children to achieve more. He knew that, with a little help from the right technology, he could turn good pupils into great ones. To do that, the 1910 glass blackboards had to go . . .



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Alison Lauder,  
Literacy Co-ordinator  
and Year 6 teacher,  
Peel Park Primary School,  
Accrington, Lancashire

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## The Solution

"The glass blackboards weighed a ton, but they were great to write on," says Alan. "They went hand in hand with the chalk-and-talk ethos and the standard textbooks that had been the school's staple for decades. Despite these traditional approaches, we were doing well. But I wanted something to take us on to the next level."

Alan needed a solution that was less teacher-led: "It was all very much one-way traffic," he says. "These days, it's all about learning styles, providing the right learning environment and having a more dynamic and creative curriculum."

## Perfect package

Alan looked at a variety of products, including Smart Boards, Promethean boards and finger-operated boards, too. There were advantages to them all, but only one company offered the perfect package.

"With some, I could have got a good deal on price, but the overall package wasn't brilliant," he says. "The Hitachi Cambridge boards were the only ones that gave us a great all-round package. We were also apprehensive about finger-operated boards - I mean, when do you actually write with your finger?"

Hitachi's package included setting-up, maintenance and training. With Peel Park needing 19 boards, a great financial deal was also key.

"We are paying for the boards over a four-year period through a lease agreement with Compulease, a company based in Cheshire," says

Alan. "We were also sold on the boards' robustness - we want them to last a long time. Duality was important as well - we can use them as dry-wipe boards, which is fantastic."

## Training

The right training was also vital, and Alan says that Hitachi didn't disappoint: "We learned a phenomenal

amount. We trained in the morning and the trainer, Kevin Sharman, stayed for the afternoon to tour the classrooms troubleshooting any problems that the staff encountered."

Peel Park's teachers have been stunned by the boards' impact. Says Alison Lauder, Literacy Co-ordinator and Year 6 teacher: "The children are actively engaged. They're switched on. They're learning and they don't even realise it."

Year 4 teacher Sharon Liggins agrees: "They've made a world of difference, and not just for numeracy and literacy. We can engage all 30 children at once - they work together, not just as individuals or in pairs. Enthusiasm and motivation have improved and that's had a knock-on effect on achievement and standards."

## Online resources

Typically, Peel Park pupils will use online educational resources like Education City, which encourages learning through games. The boards also come with top-class educational software by luminaries such as Anita Straker as standard, although Peel Park hasn't had time to fully investigate this area yet.

Google Earth has also proved popular, with awestruck children zooming in on the Eiffel Tower or Mount Everest.

For teachers, the ability to link up with laptops means they can prepare lessons at home. And being able to

display learning objectives on the boards has improved lessons, as has the ability to save pages, change fonts and use the 'intellipen', which turns even the roughest of squiggles into perfect geometrical shapes.

Alan sums up the benefits of the board: "With a blackboard, you put something up and it's there until you rub it off. With a whiteboard, you put something on, click save and it's there forever. It's simply the best teaching aid we've ever had."

## Spin-off benefit

But a spin-off benefit has been in teaching the teachers, too. "Recently, we had literacy consultants in on an 'inset' day and they used the boards for a PowerPoint presentation," says Alan.



"I don't think we'll ever learn everything about the boards - but we'll have great fun trying," says Alan.

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