Oakwood Court College: K.C Kelly-Markwick wins the hand-held learning award for special needs and inclusion

Summary

K.C.Kelly-Markwick has won a prestigious handheld learning award for her dedication and commitment to handheld learning, helping to enrich and enthuse the lives of her students through technology and the way it is used.

The award came about when one of her students nominated her after she found a device that attached to the student’s cochlea implant allowing her to hear music, enabling her to have the same inclusivity as other students.

About Oakwood Court College

Oakwood Court College is a specialist residential educational College, which provides care and support for its students, who have a range of learning needs.

The College provides support for its 35 students, all with different types of disabilities and needs, these include Asperger’s Syndrome, autism, Down’s syndrome, Williams Syndrome and other types of learning difficulties.

At Oakwood Court College every student matters and their future independence and success is at the forefront of all that we do. It is a friendly place to live, work and learn offering a great variety of academic and vocationally focused programmes. Students have a wide range of, interests, backgrounds, abilities and ambitions.

The college is committed to providing each student with the skills they need to become self-reliant in leading purposeful and fulfilling lives. This means ensuring that people with learning difficulties have the opportunity to gain knowledge and experiences that in many cases leads to employment at the conclusion of their College programme.

The college has campus-wide wireless networking and remote access to both the MIS and email, and laptops and digital cameras for staff use. There is an interactive whiteboard in most classrooms and the College provides Web Cams, screen magnifiers, digital photo frame key-rings along side accessible computer software like Vubar, Dspeech, MindMap, Art Rage, Picassa, Photo Elements to aid the students.
The challenge

The main challenge for the College was to provide the access to equipment and computer software that would enable each student to have a safe and inclusive education.

K.C. Kelly-Markwick was aware that some students’ needs were very difficult to assist with and so the College wanted to investigate new technologies and systems through support and help from organisations like the RSC SW (regional support centre south west).

The college also wanted to invest in staff training and development, so they carried out a Training Needs Analysis survey. This involved all their staff from learning support to senior staff and identified a need for a full-time Network Manager and an Information Learning Technology Coordinator. Staff took part in two day training sessions and a training programme with a weekly workshop to help improve their ICT (Information Computer Technology) skills. This would count towards their continued professional development.

The activity

K.C. decided to introduce a range of different activities utilising technology in an innovative way to help get the best out of her students, not only enhancing their education but also greatly improving their life skills.

The students are also set different practical activities around the College and the local area to help them develop social skills and further their communication skills through technology. Some of the activities include:

- Alphabet Photography and Treasure hunts
- Christmas card activities utilising Tom Tom’s to travel to the local post office for comparison of snail mail and email services
- Trips to public places such as Supermarkets

Alphabet Photography and Treasure hunts

For the Alphabet Photography and treasure hunts the idea of this is that staff would take pictures of different locations around the College campus, then print these out and laminate them. They would then print out each letter of the word ‘Oakwood Court’ onto a laminated A4 sheet and place these at the 12 different locations captured previously on campus.

The students would then have to use digital photo frames with the pictures as clues to where the laminated A4 sheets were hidden. The idea being that once the students had found every sheet that they would have the additional task of piecing each sheet together to form the word ‘Oakwood College’. To make this inclusive if the student was unable to read the letter, a number was printed on the back of the sheet. For more able students staff also assigned them the task of setting the clues at the different locations. For one student who could not read the digital photo frame because it was too small, staff printed out a Powerpoint sheet instead.
Christmas card activities utilising Tom Tom’s

The Christmas card activity involved the students creating their own cards using the web cam avatars. They then had to collect an envelope from reception and write the name and address of the person they were sending it to on the envelope. Staff at the College then explain what a post code is and what it does. To help this process they visit the website Flash Earth online and input the post code into the satellite mapping system to see how this relates to the location and post code. This is then used as evidence in their folder as a screen grab of the map.

![Tom and learners using a Tom Tom with a map](image)

Once the student has understood how the post code works, they are given the task of inputting the post code for their local post office into a Tom Tom, which is a device most commonly used in motor vehicles to aid navigation from and to different locations via satellite technology. With supervision from staff the students then leave the college as a group and use the Tom Tom to find to their local post office. Once they arrive the students have to buy the stamps for their envelope and post the envelop. When they arrive back at college the students have to use email to attach the same card to send it to the same person they posted their envelope to.

**Trips to public places**

The Tom Tom’s can also be used for other activities such as visits to other locations to learn about the different places within their community and their function. This relates to the use of technology in everyday life, at college and work. The students undertake modules such as OCR – Accreditation Life and Living. This enables them to explore the different types of technology available and how they are used and applied outside the college.
The outcomes

Alphabet Photography and Treasure hunts

This activity has enabled the students to work as a team and has given them the opportunity to use technology like the digital keyrings to search for clues to find the letters to make the word ‘Oakwood Court’. This has improved the students communication skills. The students also feel a greater sense of identity from the individual tasks that they are set, because this instils a sense of purpose and achievement.

Christmas card activities utilising Tom Tom’s

This activity has enabled the students to develop their communication and team working skills further by utilising the technology of the Tom Tom’s in an innovative and creative way. It is an interesting and dynamic way of using technology that would not necessarily be expected to be used in this way. But this has greatly helped the students mobility and ability to find places that they may have difficulty finding ordinarily.

Trips to public places

The students have been able to see directly how technology and equipment works within different areas of the community, such as:

- CCTV cameras in the shops
- ATM bank machines
- Control panels at pelican crossings
- Shop counter check-out points
- Public pay phones
They are also able to see how this works within their home, work and the college. So this puts them into contact with technology in different environments.

**The impact**

**Alphabet Photography and Treasure hunts**

What was interesting was that students could not identify the word when it was put on the ground. So they decided to change the font to Comic Sans back in the office and then one of them typed the word using a floating keyboard onto the smart board. After this was done the students were able to read the words.
Christmas card activities utilising Tom Tom’s

From an educational point of view the use of the Tom Tom’s for the Christmas card activity has directly helped the students to understand the differences between snail mail and email and also understand why a post code is used and how this is used to find places. It also gets the students to work outside of the college, using maps and life skills that they may not ordinarily use within a college environment.

Trips to public places

Students can learn that technology is not just a computer, by going outside of college and investigating technology in everyday life they are developing social skills and an awareness of their environment to gain more independence.

Useful links

Oakwood Court College
Flash Earth
Elf Yourself
Tom Tom
Logitech webcams

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