

Education Correspondent Simon Doyle



Building blocks to learning maths the fun way



A BELFAST primary school's use of a new maths learning tool is boosting numeracy and pupil confidence too, teachers claim.

St Oliver Plunkett PS has embraced interactive educational resource, Izak9, to help children engage more with maths.

Staff have said they are seeing an increased performance in both numeracy and literacy as well as boosted confidence and the overall personal development of children.

Izak9 consists of 27 cubes with different combinations of colour, number and shape, which have been proven to increase pupil performance by injecting enjoyment into numeracy through practical learning.

Developed in Northern Ireland, it is designed to stimulate mathematical thinking and interaction among pupils through task-setting and assistance from animated on-screen characters named Helix and Abacus.

Joint research by Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast found that pupils' enjoyment

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– Clare Enright

of mathematics was significantly boosted by using the resource.

P6 teacher, Clare Enright said the biggest benefit of using Izak9 in the classroom “is that it is fun”.

“Coming from a literacy background, I always thought of numeracy as a more academic, pen and paper subject – with lots of rote learning and recalling facts,” she said.

“But Izak9 means maths isn't like that – it's fun, exciting, interactive, practical, hands-on learning with opportunities for children to practise maths without the fear of failure.”

St Oliver Plunkett PS was among the first schools to use Izak9 in teaching and learning, said its creator Franz Schindwein, a former

maths teacher from Derry.

“Providing creative learning through creative education is the ethos of St Oliver Plunkett PS and it is easy to see how they live up to that by adopting innovation in their classrooms,” he said.

“I was amazed at how teachers at the school have developed the use of the resource.”

Pupils and teachers at Christ the King PS in Omagh are also taking the pencil and copybook out of learning maths by using Izak9.

Teacher Gabriel Brogan said the interactive cubes were helping pupils and also teachers to live up to the school's mission statement of ‘be the best that you can be’.



“Some-times pupils associate maths as paper and pencil exercises and when they are using Izak9, they sometimes forget they are learning through maths, as they are captured by the resource. Izak9 creates a fun element in numeracy – children are continually learning new concepts with it,” he said.

■ **CREATIVE LEARNING:** From top, P6 teacher Clare Enright quizzes pupils at St Oliver Plunkett PS on a maths problem using Izak9. Gabriel Brogan, pictured with Christ the King PS pupils Cormac McConnell, Maria Bartosik, Titas Varanavicius and Tori McMullin

Half of teenagers have cried due to stress over exams according to poll



AROUND three in 10 teenage boys admit they have cried because they are stressed out by exams, according to a poll.

It also suggests around half of young people have felt so anxious before sitting a paper that they thought they could not do it – with girls more likely to feel this way than boys.

The survey of 1,000 16 to 17-year-olds, published by the National Citizen Service (NCS), found 51 per cent of those questioned said they had cried due to exam stress.

■ **SURVEY:** A survey of 1,000 16 to 17-year-olds found that more than half cried due to exam stress while almost half have felt so anxious beforehand that they thought they would be sick

A gender breakdown shows 29 per cent of young men admitted they had felt this way, along with 73 per cent of girls.

In addition, almost half of the teenagers polled agreed they felt so anxious before an exam that they thought they would be sick (34 per cent of boys and 61 of girls).

And 51 per cent said they have felt so anxious before an exam that they thought they could not do it – with 39 per cent of boys agreeing with this, compared with 63 per cent of girls.

The NCS said it was working with mindfulness expert Danny Penman to give teenagers and their parents practical help on easing stress during exam season.

Youngsters across Britain and

Northern Ireland are now taking exams for GCSEs and other qualifications.

Dr Penman said: “I discovered mindfulness when I was a stressed-out student. What I discovered is that mindfulness can help you cope when life seems overwhelming, whether you're a teen sitting exams or a parent who is deeply concerned about your son or daughter.

“The simple steps we're sharing at www.ncsyes.co.uk can easily be incorporated into daily life and can help break the cycle of anxiety, stress, unhappiness and exhaustion at exam time or when results are looming.”

The ICM poll questioned 1,000 16 and 17-year-olds at the start of the year.