

Education Correspondent Simon Doyle



Puppets to help build children's confidence

CHILDREN identified as reluctant speakers are to benefit from a new programme that helps them build confidence. EastSide Learning has partnered with an east Belfast teacher to develop Hearsay, which targets children in P2.

It is aimed at those who need more support to develop good listening skills.

Created by Caroline Lennox, literacy coordinator in Victoria Park PS, Hearsay uses stories and exercises to promote active listening and thoughtful talk.

It also helps practitioners create an environment where children feel valued and happy to communicate using puppets as prompts.

The use of puppets helps to provide a more relaxed atmosphere for positive communication during the sessions.

A pilot was supported in Victoria Park PS last year.

The 12-week intervention is targeted at children identified as reluctant speakers or needing additional support. They remain in school between 2pm and 3pm and the programme is delivered by the teacher within their normal working hours.

A total of eight primary schools are planning to implement Hearsay from this month.

Ms Lennox said there was an increasing number of children in foundation stage with poor listening and communication skills.

"It's important that we explore methods to help tackle this issue," she said.

"The Hearsay programme resources were developed with advice from RISE NI and using puppets, social stories and props as a tool to engage children in productive talk.

"With this research I developed two puppets – Champ the dog and Harland the cat – and created stories about



■ **COMMUNICATION SKILLS:** Maggie Andrews from EastSide Learning and teacher Caroline Lennox, who developed Hearsay

them that the children could relate to. The stories have a local context, which sets a more relaxed atmosphere for positive communication."

Ms Andrews said EastSide Learning was delighted to help develop Hearsay, which would contribute to improving outcomes for children who could otherwise be left behind.

"Teachers are always thinking of new ways to help children learn but often

they have to rely on their own expertise as resources are often expensive or not locally relevant," she said.

"It is essential that we offer support to develop this teaching talent in our schools and we hope that the Hearsay programme is the start of doing just that."

Ann Burton, principal of Knocknagoney PS, praised the initiative.

"This work will have impact in all

our schools and help to ensure that children get the help they need at the earliest possible stage using these great resources," she said.

"As it is delivered in the period between 2pm and 3pm within normal school hours it has minimum cost, which is vitally important as there is very little financial support available to schools to develop new programmes."



■ **AWARD:** Franz Schlindwein's Izak9 learning resource has scooped the Best Maths Resource award from Teach Primary. **PICTURE:** Lorcan Doherty

Five stars for Derry maths resource

NORTHERN Ireland-made maths learning resource Izak9 has won an award from schools' magazine *Teach Primary*. Izak9 has been named best Maths Resource by the respected publication for schools and teachers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

More than 450 products and publications were nominated for honours. A panel of primary subject experts selected 33 resources, bestowing five-star, four-star and three-star prizes in each category. Izak9, which was developed and is manufactured in Derry, secured five-stars amid tough competition. The resource consists of a box of cubes with a combination of 27 different colours, numbers and shapes which can be used in conjunction with a vast vault of online support materials. Research has shown that Izak9 has enhanced pupils' performance in maths class by injecting fun into learning.

Melanie Muldowney, judge and chair of the Teaching Committee at the Mathematical Association, praised Izak9.

"The cubes are very tactile, and we couldn't resist coming up with ideas about how we would use them in lessons. The online support material is a massive bonus to the resource – it's very easy to use and to get started took just seconds," she said.

Izak9 creator Franz Schlindwein said the team was delighted and humbled to accept the honour.

A former secondary school teacher, Mr Schlindwein developed Izak9 out of a determination to help "stimulate a mathematical thinking among primary and secondary school children".

"Along with animated assistance from on screen characters Helix and Abacus, Izak9 is changing how maths is being taught in schools around the UK, Ireland and much further afield," he said.

South West College in engineering partnership with Chinese school

SOUTH West College is to develop and deliver education and training courses for the automotive industry in partnership with an institution in China.

A 'memorandum of understanding' has been signed between SWC and Wuxi Vocational and Technical High School of Automotive Engineering.

It forms part of SWC's growing international education strategy.

It is hoped the partnership will benefit the wider automotive industry by helping address the global skills shortage.

SWC chief executive Michael McAlister said Wuxi School had an exceptional reputation in China, having forged a close partnership with the BMW Group and the Chinese ministry of education, winning the



delivery contracts for three major projects.

"The school is also cooperating

with the AHK Shanghai Representative Office (AHK) and Wuxi Commercial Building Group Dongfang

■ ADDRESSING GLOBAL SKILLS SHORTAGE:

Signing the MOU are, front row, GuMingzhu, Ji Lini, Michael McAlister and Nicholas O'Shiel. Back row, Andrew Thompson and Lily Lin

Automobile Co Ltd to carry out the development of a pilot project of modern apprenticeship to train highly-skilled personnel in automotive technology and we are delighted to be a part of this partnership," he said.

The project will improve the mutual understanding and delivery of world-class professional education and training in automotive industry skills through joint initiatives in curriculum development and delivery.

Partners will benefit from collaboration on curriculum design with the specific aim of developing a 'sandwich' programme at Level 4, enabling Chinese students to spend a year in the UK; and to share knowledge, expertise and experience in industry engagement.