

Case Study – Aston School



Overview

Aston Comprehensive is a mixed comprehensive school of approximately 1800 pupils aged from 11 to 18. It is the largest school in Rotherham, educating almost 10% of the area's Secondary population, and one of the largest schools in England and Wales. The school's Support for Learning Department provides quality provision for students with special educational needs and Aston is currently in its third year of Specialist School status in Mathematics and Computing. The Aston Mathematics Department has led the school's drive towards ever improving academic performance.

The Brief

In Summer 2004 Aston Comprehensive and the Specialist Schools Trust undertook a joint commercial venture to update the facilities at Aston Comprehensive and provide a state-of-the-art Maths ICT suite. The Aston mathematics facilities greatly needed improving and modernising. The Maths classroom created an old-school, impersonal environment with cumbersome PC boxes on desks and too many trailing wires. The technology disengaged pupils and provided a distraction. Aston and the Trust had a vision for the classroom of the future that recognises the individual and encourages personalised learning. A specialist firm of architects were originally enlisted to try and make this vision a reality. However, Aston and the Trust were far more concerned with the overall learning environment than just the aesthetics and the architects' design was rejected. It was then that Aston asked us to help.

Our Approach

Recommended by a bursar at the School, we immediately set about creating a cutting-edge, bespoke and fully customised solution for the Aston Maths suite. Although limited by budget and a small space, our design created a completely different feel for the room – a clean, inspiring and futuristic environment and one that addresses individual students' needs, strengths and weaknesses. Our approach was to create a vibrant and better quality learning environment. Recognising that every child has a different way of learning, we brought the PC and internet connection into each student's own area allowing them to progress their own learning.

Four of the 56 student workstations provided were equipped with push-button height adjustment and two customised teacher workstations were fitted to the walls adjacent to white boards. The new Maths ICT suite is a more efficient use of the space and now means a much greater ratio of PCs to pupils. Even though there were significant restrictions of space, our design resulted in the 30-pupil classroom having 28 PCs – including two with motorised legs for disabled users. The robust design means that the room is multi-purpose, easy to maintain and extremely adaptable to any lesson plan – in 30 seconds the PC's can be folded down and the desks used for other work.



A Classroom Transformed

John Lyon, Assistant Head Teacher at Aston Comprehensive, comments "Nowadays there's so much technology in the students' bedrooms, we can't match that in a book, or on a blackboard – only if you're in a (Intelligent Furniture) suite which is a clean, modern, zappy environment. The (Intelligent Furniture) design has completely transformed the Maths rooms. It was exactly what we wanted. It's now a fun place to learn. It is an environment that the students want to learn in and they look forward to going to lessons in the room. The mood of the classroom has completely changed. Teachers have re-examined the way they teach, in order to make full use of the learning opportunities offered. Everyone at Aston who has used the suite believes it encourages better learning."

