

Summary of Schoolzone evaluation of AlphaSmart Classroom Response System (CRS)

Full details found at www.schoolzone.co.uk

All evaluators of the CRS voting system were enthusiastic about the system, as were the students in the classes that were included in the trial. No significant difficulties were encountered with installation or use. The teachers commented that the display screen on the handheld unit makes it unique in the marketplace.

They saw it as an advantage that the system is wireless and that any unit can be used by any pupil, but that each student can access personalised questions via a PIN number. Teachers used the CRS to create their own tests and quizzes, which were then marked and the results displayed. It was tested with PowerPoint (PPT), interactive whiteboards (IWB) and resources found on the internet.

The CRS was used to create different types of questions and they noted that answers can be weighted to allow for differentiation. The units were used for homework and the potential for use outside the classroom was mentioned, if they have been programmed with questions in advance.

The teachers commented on the fact that quizzes or tests designed to be used with the CRS could be differentiated to suit all abilities, and that all were encouraged to participate in lessons by the degree of confidentiality afforded by the system. This affected both extremes of the ability scale: the very able as well as the less able. The CRS enabled teachers rapidly to assess learning in the classroom and hence adapt planning, even in the course of a lesson. They were better able to target resources to those students who needed them as a result. The possibility of enlarging text was invaluable to enable a child with significant sight impairment to use the CRS.

The system of unique identification allowed the teachers to track children individually as well as showing general trends. This information could be stored and output in a variety of ways and enabled the teachers to share the data with the children to demonstrate their learning. This resulted in children asking for more tests to show their progress. One teacher commented that teachers' time is saved by the analysis of results via the CRS.

The teachers found the handheld units to be robust. It was felt that the CRS could be used for any subject, or for voting on class or school issues. It enabled teachers to use a variety of questioning and gave pupils ownership of their learning.

Student reaction to the CRS was positive. Initial excitement gave way to sustained enjoyment. Teachers noted improved student engagement, a demand for further opportunities to use the equipment and an increase in competitiveness. Pupils are able to input their answers anonymously and this enables those from both extremes of the ability spectrum to demonstrate their knowledge without fear of being judged by their peers. Teachers noted that they were able to gather information about individual student progress, store this information and output it in various formats. The pupil results could be tracked over a term. They were able to share this information with pupils and their parents.

Both students and teachers enjoyed the AlphaSmart CRS evaluation. The teachers felt that there were significant benefits in using the system and all would buy it. The students responded enthusiastically and even demanded more work to demonstrate their progress, as shown on the CRS reports. A demonstrable increase in student participation levels in class was noted. The design of the system was commented on favourably, especially the robust handsets and the wireless technology. No technical problems were encountered during the evaluation period.

Differentiation and special needs were felt to be well catered for. The system enabled teachers to target their resources to those most in need. Individual tracking and analysis was seen to be beneficial and a time saving tool for teachers.

Quotes from teachers involved in the evaluation:

"Initially I used it with PowerPoint, but it's possible to use it with your interactive whiteboard software or using the internet directly."

"The product has been used, by the various groups, in all parts of the lesson; starter, main and plenary to good effect. Does the product have a 'wow' factor? Yes it most certainly does..."

"I could see this would be a very useful tool to use if pupils were out on a visit and could have prompts and questions to encourage them to look around as they went."

"In terms of integrating the product into schemes of work there is hardly any work to be done. The product can be used (in my opinion!) at anytime in a lesson with any class...and believe me I've deliberately trialled the product with some of my school's most challenging pupils."

"I have a child in my class with a significant visual impairment, and it was possible to enlarge the text for her so that she was able to use the unit."

"The units are very robust, and look similar to a TV channel changer, except that they also have a small display screen. They feel very 'solid' and one or two pupils who dropped theirs, inevitably perhaps, caused little concern, as the units still remained functional, without even a scratch on them."

"This evaluation has been a dream ... Everything necessary to use the product is included in the package and installation is easy to do. "

"To say that pupils were enthused by the product is an understatement! There was a real buzz of excitement using this product, and I personally have not had the situation of pupils asking for more homework because they enjoyed doing it so much."

"For pupils, it gives each one of them a voice, and the room to offer their input into a lesson without fear of ridicule, or disappointment of letting the rest of the class know whether their answer was correct or not. "

"No matter what the age, gender or ability of the pupil the novelty of having a handset welcome you personally ensured that lessons started with both a bang and a good atmosphere."

"The time saved from the software doing the analysis work for me was also useful: all I needed to do was look at the graphs and decipher them."

"Pupils when using this product were more enthused than I have seen them in a while. All pupils were engaged and on task."

"One interesting side effect of using the product has been the rise in competitiveness amongst my pupils. In classes where previously pupils haven't been bothered about achieving, use of this product has bred an atmosphere of competitiveness so intense that I'm positively shocked at it."

"All results gained whilst using Acceltest are stored and can be brought up by the teacher at a time of their choosing. This enables proper evaluation of pupil attainment, obtained by examination of assessment data to be done with a minimum of hassle at the most opportune time."

"Sound too good to be true? Well it used to be- but not now! AlphaSmart have come up with a product which does all of the above."

For more information visit:

www.alphasmart.co.uk

