

UK schools turn to pioneering Australian computer program to boost literacy and numeracy standards

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• Ground-breaking educational tool identifies each student's needs in numeracy and literacy to allow students to succeed and reach full potential. British schools are turning to an Australian online testing and teaching package to boost standards of literacy and numeracy. The program, which automatically tests pupils and then devises lessons tailored to their individual strengths and weaknesses, has produced spectacular results in Australia. Now UK schools, such as Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham are piloting its introduction in the hope that it will produce similar improvements in standards.

Senior educationalists in London will attend a Future School showcase on Tuesday 8 February at One Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster to witness how the online teaching and testing package can boost levels of numeracy and literacy in their schools.

The progress already made by Future School was confirmed by an independent Ofsted report which concluded: "Future School has shown positive learning gains in numeracy and literacy in a short period of time. Pupils in the test groups do better than their counterparts."

The revolutionary learning package is being introduced against the background of an educational crisis in the UK.

A recent study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found that since 2006 the educational standard of 15-year olds in the UK has slipped dramatically.

The UK, despite being the eighth-biggest spender per pupil on education, performed below the international average in maths ranking 28th, and at 25th, only just above in reading.

The study also found that a fifth of 15-year-old Britons are 'functionally illiterate', which 'significantly reduces their chances of success in later life'. In comparison, Australia ranked 9th in reading and 15th in maths.

The Future School SMART diagnostic program, catering for all age groups, could revolutionise the way students learn in the UK by identifying every student's needs in numeracy and literacy and designing a tailored programme to meet those needs.

Its makers insist it does not replace the traditional classroom teacher but offers every teacher a reliable, low cost assistant, enabling them to cope with mixed ability classes and give every child a tailor-made English and maths course.

Case studies from Australia, where over 250 schools, and more than 200,000 students have completed the diagnostic assessment, demonstrate dramatic improvements in levels of numeracy and literacy.

In 2009, the Australian International Academy, conducted an extensive trial of the English and mathematics programmes, using three control groups that clearly identified an average 23 per cent improvement over the 60-day trial period.

Ms Julie MacPherson, the co-ordinating teacher, concluded: "More significant than the overall result was the engagement of the students and their positive comments. The student's couldn't wait to see their results and how much they had improved. They found it challenging but fun as well."

In the UK, the package has been piloted at Djanogly City Academy, Nottingham helping to improve the literacy and numeracy levels among its pupils.

Mr Jon Marshall, the Academy's E-learning leader, said: "The software has been received well by both students and staff alike as the user interface is intuitive. This is a critical factor when considering new learning technologies."

Future School is an ideal tool for supporting our ethos of personalised learning. As teachers, we are able to set the level of work according to the ability of the student and monitor their progress online. It also enables students to work at their own pace and continue their learning at home."

Rob Mudie, Operations Director at Future School, explained the principle behind the program: "This new diagnostic tool is critical to improving the students' standards of numeracy and literacy. It has proven to be very effective in improving the students' levels of competence in grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. Tests are all very well, but 'weighing the pig' does not increase its weight. And no more does repeated testing educate the child. What's required is an understanding of what areas need addressing, and the means to do it effectively."

Ian Taylor, Leader of maths and numeracy at the Academies Enterprise Trust, the organisation behind many new academies in the UK, also praised the program: "Much of the future of learning lies in the use of powerful online resources that satisfy the needs both of the teacher and the student. The Future School system does these things extremely well."

The SMART package has also been trialled in the USA where it produced significant gains among children with learning difficulties.

The San Jose Conservation Corps Charter School, in California, is an example of students with learning difficulties using the Future School system to reach their potential.

Ms Victoria Stevens, Learning Co-ordinator and Counsellor, commented: "Many of the students suffered from extremely low self-esteem and were difficult to engage, having previously failed either academically or socially."

"The innovative programme has engaged students who previously had little or no interest in learning. It has been amazing to see the students gain interest in Mathematics and English again and endeavour to achieve high results every time they log in, thanks to the interactive lessons, one-on-one video tutorials and lesson examinations."

She continued: "The program gives students immediate feedback and this has encouraged them further. I have never seen a student attempt a test multiple times and be happy to do this, but Future School somehow seems to motivate the students to not give up until they have achieved 100 per cent."

"Diagnosing levels of achievement is one thing, but providing a solution to the problem of addressing every child's specific needs has been the challenge," says David King, Founder and Director of Future School in Australia.

"By addressing each student's specific needs, no longer do they need to fall behind, or be held back, as they progress at their own pace."

The Individualised Learning Plan (ILP) is mapped to the UK curriculum and has over 3 million randomised questions. The ILP only consists of lessons where the student shows a weakness or insufficient understanding of the lesson materials, and gets progressively more difficult, creating a complete, individualised study plan."

"The most important element of a great education is the quality of teaching, but teachers struggle to be all things to children, and this dilemma inevitably results in many children failing to reach their potential. With Future School, every child follows an individual learning plan and the teacher simply monitors progress."

Future School don't replace the teacher in the classroom, but it does support their role by providing a tireless teaching assistant," said Mr King.

"Knowing now where the need lies, the teacher simply monitors each student's progress through the interactive lessons that are linked to the study plan, giving the teacher more freedom to work with individuals who require attention and freeing other students to follow their own plan."

"The teacher can also create tailored courses that contain an automated exam and study plan lesson for specialised learning groups or individuals," added Mr King.

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For more information (including the showcase on Tuesday 8 February, 10am) and media enquiries please contact Romilly Dennys of Media Intelligence Partners on 07786 221309/0203 0088149.

Notes to editors:

Future School is a global leader in the development of learning management systems, educational software, online tutoring and motivational educational games.

Future School has over 25 years' experience in tutoring students in the classroom and after school facilities, providing both face-to-face, telephone and online assistance in the two core areas of literacy and numeracy.

Future School also has many years' experience in Australia in the development of Basic Skills Tests in mathematics and English covering years 3, 5, and 7, including the materials, delivery, marking, psychometrics and reporting to State Education Departments, schools, and parents.

Mature-Aged learning and up-skilling staff:

Future School online learning systems now cater for the mature-aged student or for companies looking to up-skill their staff with ESL, literacy and numeracy courses. The courses carry recognition and accreditation worldwide, and with a flexible learning platform that is second to none and offers large corporate entities a viable educational and economical solution for their company and their staff.

Benefits of Future School:

- Instant online access to over 1200 lessons is available 24/7 when needed
- Over 3 million questions which are randomly chosen ensuring questions are not repeated
- Courses are mapped to UK curriculum
- Builds self-esteem and confidence
- As if you have a personal tutor on call
- Regular use guarantees improved exam results
- Used by hundreds of thousands worldwide
- Highly cost-effective at every level