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Case Study: Auriol Junior School, Epsom, Surrey

Auriol Junior School provides mainstream primary education for 390 pupils at KS2 – Years 3-6. The school was built in the 1930's and has been modernised to meet the requirements of the new curriculum including a Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), a Music Lodge and a planned environmental/woodland area.

The inclusion of pupils with special educational needs is very important to Auriol School. Hearing-impaired children are integrated across the year groups alongside a number of pupils who have other special needs including language and communication disorders, attention deficit disorders (e.g. ADHD) and behavioural difficulties. The school has been modified to accommodate a variety of special needs with all areas being carpeted except for the school halls.

Soundfield systems were installed in the school hall, the ICT Suite and three classrooms in September 2006; they have proved so successful that Auriol has now installed Soundfield systems throughout the school. The program to lower the ceilings in all classrooms is almost complete and will improve acoustics for the benefit of all students.



Meryl Hunt – Inclusion Manager and Teacher in Charge of Hearing Support was born with a hearing loss and was diagnosed with a 40% loss at the age of 11. Meryl joined Auriol's teaching staff in 1996. "An advert came up for a supply teacher in the Hearing Impaired Unit; I applied and it soon became a permanent post with a two year training course at Oxford Brookes to become a Teacher of the Deaf and full time job!"

All the hearing impaired children wear hearing aids or cochlear processors supported by fmGenie radio aid systems, which work in conjunction with Soundfield systems to provide the best listening experience and quality of sound for the student.

Gail Larkin – Head Teacher – said "The teachers certainly notice the difference, with the reduction of voice strain when using Soundfield and I'm sure the children are more focused in class. The improvements to the schools acoustics benefit all the children and in particular the children with a hearing impairment."





Meryl now has 70% hearing loss and thinks Soundfield is great! She said “Before we had Soundfield systems fitted to all the classrooms I used to teach in a classroom installed with Soundfield 3 times a week and certainly noticed the strain to my voice on the days when I was not in those classrooms. With a Soundfield system I don’t have to raise my voice and pupils can hear me at the back. Soundfield is really valuable when the class is involved in group discussions. If I want to attract one child’s attention I just have to say their name and I have their attention immediately. They stop their discussion and look up. This usually has a quietening effect on the other children as they are anticipating me speaking. In the same way, if all the children are engrossed in their own activities I speak through the Soundfield, get an immediate response and can engage the whole class again.

In the classes that have not yet been fitted with Soundfield I have to go up to a child to get their attention, or shout or waste time trying to get the



whole class attention. With my own hearing impairment it is difficult to hear the children’s response to my questions unless I am a few feet away from them. With the Soundfield system the children can pass around the handheld microphone so that I can hear their responses clearly. As we have Soundfield installed in the school hall, I can hear everyone speak from the stage even if I am standing at the back.”

Classroom

The children seem to like Soundfield and enjoy their lessons more when the system is in use. The Year 6 students were enthusiastic when asked what they most liked about their Soundfield systems:



Brad age 11 & Elliott age 10 sit furthest from their teacher at the back of the class; “We can hear the teacher better, especially when she’s explaining homework or giving us instructions, so we don’t miss anything or get it wrong. If our teacher is at the computer, which means she’s facing the wall, we can still hear her properly if the Soundfield is on.”

Cameron age 10 said “Soundfield is helpful because you don’t miss anything that the teacher says.”

Fae, age 10, lost her hearing at the age of 5, had hearing aids fitted at 6, then a cochlear implant at 7. She uses an fmGenie radio aid with her cochlear processor and prefers this system combined with Soundfield in her lessons. “I can hear better as the teacher’s voice is louder and can concentrate better without the distraction of other noises around.”

Mae, age 10, lost her hearing at the age of 2, wore hearing aids at 4 and had a cochlear implant at 5. She’s very proud of her hot pink processor which she has had since she was 8. She said, “When there is a lot of noise in the classroom, especially when the boys are shouting, I can’t hear the teacher properly, but if the Soundfield system is on and I have my radio aid on, I can hear the teacher above all the noise.”

Jessica, 10, Victoria, 10, Nicole, 10, Jack, 11, Liam, 10 and Alex, 10, sit together at the back of the class and prefer lessons where Soundfield is used;

"It's good for the children at the back of the classroom to hear the teacher"

"The teacher's voice is quiet when the Soundfield is off and the teacher wastes her voice shouting"

"If the children have quiet voices they can use the handheld mic and we can all hear them speak."

"If there is no system on it sounds like the teacher is cross and we are being told off, but she's just having to shout to be heard."

Liam also said "When the Soundfield system is on the teacher doesn't have to shout all the time, so I don't feel like I'm being told off. I feel much happier in my lesson and I can just carry on with my work in peace."



ICT Suite

Debbie Manville – IT Technician – said "The Soundfield system installed in the IT Suite is very good. I'm not trained to project my voice and Soundfield means I don't have to shout to be heard. With the buzz of work going on in IT it's important that the children can all hear me. I like Soundfield especially because I can turn it off when I need to speak with an individual child and then just turn it on again with the flick of a switch when I want the attention of the whole class again, wherever I am standing in the room. I don't have to rush to the front of the class waving my hands and shouting to attract their attention. And....I don't have a sore throat at the end of the lesson!"

The IT Suite often has two members of staff attending



the session, so while one member of staff wears the collar worn microphone, the other can use the handheld microphone. **Debbie** said, "We can just pick up the handheld mic and speak to the children on the spur of the moment or the children can also use it if they have found out something interesting that they want to share with the rest of the class."

Mrs Linda Horsley – HLTA – thinks Soundfield is "...amazing! It's difficult to be heard above the noise of the computers and the air conditioning. Before Soundfield I had to project my voice more to the point of shouting. IT is meant to be interactive and to provoke discussion and it is much harder for the hearing impaired child to hear over the hum of the equipment – Soundfield enables my voice to be heard over the background noise. I can also get the whole class attention quickly. We use the countdown method: 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 and rarely get to number 1!"

The children often wear headphones in the IT Suite to hear the audio from the computer. The teacher



normally has to raise her voice to be heard during these sessions. **Danielle, age 10**, said, "I can hear the teacher speaking when I'm wearing headphones, but she does have to shout, if she's using Soundfield she can speak to us in a normal voice and that's better for everyone."



School Hall - Assembly

The teacher holding assembly usually wears the collar worn microphone and speaks at a normal level. The children sitting at the back of the hall can hear clearly and are able to participate in answering questions as happily as if they were sitting in the front row. Children can go up on stage, speak through the handheld mic and can be heard at the back of the hall even if their voices are very quiet. The hand held microphone is popular and helps to boost confidence. The children are all engaged in the assembly so reducing boredom and the tendency to fidget.

Special Needs

Some children with behavioural difficulties (including ADHD) have difficulty gauging expression and understanding the difference between shouting to be heard and shouting aggressively (i.e. to tell someone off). Soundfield can have a calming effect on the behaviour of children with these difficulties as the

teacher does not have to raise their voice to be heard. The child then has a much more positive learning experience than without the system, also reducing the time taken with resolving misunderstandings.

In conclusion Meryl Hunt said, "I notice the acoustic differences between teaching in the 'normal' classrooms and those with the Soundfield System - but then Auriol is so different from the secondary schools where I taught in London initially.

My ideal world would be Soundfield systems in all classrooms, in all schools and all teachers enthusiastically using them."



For further information please contact:
CONNEVANS LIMITED
Tel: 01737 247571 Minicom: 01737 243134

Email: soundfield@connevans.com
Website: www.connevans.com/soundfield