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A major interior refurbishment at one of Hobart's oldest educational establishments has brought both classes of each year level into close proximity, creating what senior staff believe is a more conducive and cooperative learning and teaching environment.

Central to the success of the larger, more open classrooms is Hear and Learn's RedCAT audio technology, designed to deliver clear audio of the teachers' voice direct to each child in the space.

After seeing Hear and Learn's technology at a conference in 2013, St Mary's College Junior School Director, Brigid Knight, recognised the potential of the system for St Mary's and volunteered to trial it at the school. Her interest related to one student in particular who had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, one of the symptoms of which is a child's inability to distinguish surrounding noise from sound. Ms Knight recalls the response from teaching staff at the time who believed it made a significant difference.

"Teaching staff immediately noticed a marked difference, particularly in that child's ability to attend to what was going on in the classroom and what the teacher was saying," says Ms Knight. "It had a positive impact on the entire class, particularly the boys."

Ms Knight mounted a case for the directional audio system to be installed in every St Mary's classroom, partly to address a learning need but also because it was a positive application for every child in the school.

It's been a significant investment but one which Ms Knight believes has more than repaid itself in positive student learning outcomes. Within 12 months the system was in all eight infant classes and within two years Hear and Learn's RedCATs were installed across all 16 classrooms at St Mary's, from Prep to Grade 6. The RedCATs deliver audio in a way that makes it sound as though the teacher is speaking directly to each student in a low, moderated tone while eliminating distracting background sound.

Celebrating its 150th year in 2018, this year St Mary's completes an investment of \$\$\$\$ in the refurbishment of classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 6. One of the aims of the refurbishment was to double stream the classes; to physically locate classes side by side. Ten classrooms have been moved or remodelled within the footprint of the school's original 149 year old structure.

The result is more spacious and interactive classroom spaces with sliding glass doors to enhance the open feel. In the process there have been a number of classroom moves and changes but, according to Ms Knight, the reorganisation is now more conducive to both cooperative learning and teaching.

The Hear and Learn technology comes to the fore when the two classes come together. Generally the children will be doing small group work rather than the entire class working as a whole, but activity times can be busy.

"The RedCATs have made a massive improvement in both concentration and listening for students during these busy, whole class activity times in particular," says Prep Teacher Ms Shanny. "There was an instantaneous response when we first used it. It's amazing how powerful it was."

Ms Shanny is also the learning support coordinator for the Lantern Program, which tailors child centred support and extension learning programs for students. Hear and Learn's technology is being used by teaching staff within the Lantern Program as well as by St Mary's specialist teachers, including the Chinese, PE and music.

**Parents are acknowledged as critical members of the teaching triumvirate of students, school and family, and are welcomed into the St Mary's community. Prep parent helpers are often curious when they see the Hear and Learn technology in the learning spaces.

"The RedCATs were demonstrated and shown at a Prep Parent Night recently and the benefits of the system were outlined. There's a lot of support for it from the parent body," says Ms Shanny.

According to Ms Lack, the Hear and Learn technology has become an integral part of each classroom, for students as well as staff.

"The Prep students ask "Where's the microphone?" if I'm not using it," says Ms Lack. "They really notice the contrast of not using it for their learning. I really notice not having it too. Before the system was introduced, I regularly lost my voice during winter, but since the RedCATs have been installed I haven't lost my voice once. Being able to moderate our voices reduces constant vocal strain but our rooms are also calm and the students are happy. Its a great system."

An unexpected benefit with the classroom based RedCAT system is the opportunity for students to become familiar with and practise using and handling microphones. Each class takes turns presenting at the weekly Liturgy prayer service at St Mary's Cathedral and at the fortnightly whole school assembly.

"They're all used to the microphones now," says Ms Shanny. "Understandably, there was a bit of initial hesitation but they've all picked up these unexpected bonus skills very quickly."