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It was the reaction of a Year 3 student to new technology that made the Head of St Stephen's Primary School, Darnelle Pretorius, realise the profound impact the classroom audio system could have for children with auditory processing problems.

"When that student said 'Wow, I can really hear you. What's different?', I realised the potential for Hear and Learn's audio system across our school," said Ms Pretorius.

For children with auditory processing issues, clear and individualised instruction is vital.

"Without it, and in a busy classroom setting full of enthusiastic students and lots of activity, they can become confused."

If a child cannot hear their teacher's instruction, the result can be misinterpreted as disruptive behaviour and, longer term, these aural complications can develop into mispronounced and misspelt words which exacerbates their learning issues.

"Our aim is to directly address hearing issues, including glue ear and auditory processing problems," said Ms Pretorius. "We want to support our students who might be struggling with these problems and provide them with a calm, inclusive learning environment."

With Hear and Learn's RedCAT system at St Stephen's School, teaching instruction is moderated throughout the teaching spaces and each child receives clear and enhanced delivery of the teacher's voice.

The result is individualised learning, improved classroom management, reduced distraction for students with learning or developmental delay, and successful learning outcomes across the whole class.

Sandra Corcoran, who teaches Pre-Primary at St Stephen's School, appreciates the independence the RedCAT technology offers her students and the opportunity it provides for positive role modelling.

"The children become proficient in monitoring the use of the system and making sure it is recharged correctly," said Ms Corcoran. "It's a novelty to start with, but the responsibility of charging the units and looking after and having them ready to use helps them develop positive social skills and is a real confidence booster for some of our quieter students."

It also means students are familiar with the system when it's used in other settings, such as whole school assemblies.

"Oral language is such an important part of students' learning," said Ms Corcoran. "Our RedCAT system makes it possible for children who are hesitant or shy or a child with a speech impediment to be clearly understood by their peers and classmates."

"You can't overestimate the positive impact that has for their self esteem and social and emotional development."

A bonus of the technology is that it can be switched off or on as the situation and classroom program demands change, particularly in the Pre Primary setting. Hear and Learn's RedCATs are so much part of school life at St Stephen's School, it's not until they are turned off that Ms Corcoran notices a distinct difference in the level of background noise in the room.

For a handful of children on the autism spectrum in her classes, Ms Corcoran believes the RedCATs provide crucial support, particularly when the class transitions activities.

“If these students in particular are pre warned of a change in activity and the required movement around our classroom, they are better able to cope with that change. Their success in those instances means they remain calm among their peers and more confident in their learning.”

As well as a classroom management aid, the RedCATs are useful assessment tools for the early detection of any oral speech problems, including stutter.

Student presentations using the RedCAT system take project reports to a whole new level, with an unexpected side benefit. According to Ms Corcoran, the delivery of science project research recently using the RedCAT microphones demonstrated the students’ considerable public speaking skills.

“Using the RedCATs they really stepped up to the challenge,” said Ms Corcoran. “Their public speaking skills have been an unexpected side benefit to having the system in our school.”

It has certainly been a bonus for casting St Stephen’s School’s annual musical production for students in Years 3 - 6. According to both Ms Pretorius and Ms Corcoran, the introduction of RedCATs at St Stephen’s School means there’s no shortage of students with public speaking experience keen to participate, and the performances are a sell-out.

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