



Case Study: Oak Lodge Special School, Barnet

Took part in the I'm a Scientist pilot event in June 2008

Teacher:	Mairead Ulamoleka
Type of school:	Special school
Year group:	Year 10
Subject:	Entry Level Certificate Level 3
Ability:	Mixed, moderate learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders
Number of students:	13
Time spent on website:	1.5 hours
Times visited website:	5

Key points

- Students were very engaged by the live chat
- Students **talked about science issues**, which they would never have done prior to participating in I'm A Scientist
- Feeling that their opinions mattered was important to the students
- Communication with scientists was good, and their quick responses impressed both the students and teacher
- Lesson plans were **adaptable** for use with students attending a special school
- Building in time for teachers to get to know the site in advance of the main launch would be useful

The teacher, Mairead Ulamoleka had previously debated issues in the classroom in a mainstream school, and felt that I'm A Scientist (IAS) was a good opportunity for her current students to become more confident in their debating skills. She had two objectives for participating in IAS. The first was for her students to understand how science works in the real world. As Mairead felt that her students' opinions are often not as valued as other peoples', her second objective was to use IAS as an opportunity for her students to voice their opinions.

Because of her students' needs and ability level Mairead did not use all of the lesson plans or any of the information sheets that were provided. However, she felt that it was still beneficial to have received the plans. Initially the whole class had a lesson on the role of science, and they used the IVF cards (lesson 2: IVF Debate) to do some debating. Later in the event, in order to vote, the class had to be split in two because a proportion of her students needed one-to-one adult support on the computers, so while half the class were voting the other half got on with a different activity. Mairead thought that it was good for her students to be able to interact by voting even if they did not want to ask any questions themselves.

The speed at which questions were asked and answers were received worked very well for this group, and so the students were very engaged by the online live chat (lesson 4) "They were shocked when they got a response right away from a

scientist!" Also, because the scientists had the opportunity to talk about themselves personally, the students got to realise that the scientists were 'normal' people.

Having the site up and running slightly earlier would have been better from the teacher's point of view, as this would have given her the opportunity to go through it and try it in advance with one or two students so that they were able to use and navigate the site before the whole class joined in. At Oak Lodge they do not have as many lessons as in a mainstream school, so if they did not get through all of their IAS work in one lesson it was not always possible to carry it over to the next. Also, quite often the students' reading ability was at a lower level than in a mainstream school so an adult had to read the information on the IAS site to them. For this group, having an audio voice-over of the text would have been incredibly useful.

Communication with Gallomanor was felt to have been very good, both before and during the event, and Mairead appreciated being kept up to date on everything by email. She also thought the teachers' packs were excellent and liked the shocking pink colour of the folder "Even though there's always a mess on my desk it stood out, which made life easier." She also felt that communication with the scientists was good and, like her students, was impressed by their quick responses.

The role of scientists and the IVF debate were the things Mairead thought her students learned the most from; for example, the students were heard talking among themselves and to teachers about science issues, which is something they would never have done before. Feeling that their opinions mattered was also very important to the students – the overall voting pattern reflecting which scientists they had voted for is a good example of this.

Interviewed by Yvonne Harris, independent evaluation consultant